Standards for Media Programs in Schools

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IN THESE TRYING TIMES when the news about school media programs, like that about schools and education in general, tends to reflect the doleful effects of recession, inflation, variegated stalemates, and other plagues, it is a rewarding, comforting, and stimulating experience to receive reports about activities relating to standards for school media programs happening on a widespread scale throughout the nation. These activities reflect involvement, planning, and cooperation among individuals and associations; support of educational agencies; and a reaffirmation of the belief in continuously working toward providing all young people with one basic ingredient in the equalization of educational opportunity—the right to have media services and resources for their reading, listening, viewing, and thinking.

This article presents some general observations about state and national standards in this country derived from (1) the professional literature, (2) from an examination of current state standards, recommendations, or guidelines for media centers, (3) from the answers to a questionnaire sent to state school library supervisors, and (4) from information gained from activities connected with the formulation and implementation of national standards. This overview deals briefly with some selected aspects relating to standards: the definition of standards, background developments, the current scene, the impact of national standards, and issues or challenges affecting standards.

The 1969 *Standards for School Media Programs* defines "*media center*" as "a learning center in a school where a full range of print and audiovisual media, necessary equipment, and services from media specialists are accessible to students and teachers."[1] Other terminology used throughout the standards, all defined in the glossary, reflects this

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scope of resources and services: media, media program, media center, media staff, media specialist, media technician, media aide, system media center, and unified media program. The terminology used in this article follows that in the 1969 national standards.

Standards Defined

An examination of standards quickly reveals the variety of treatment in their presentation and coverage. Existing standards can be classified in several ways: (1) by function (qualitative, quantitative, or a combination thereof); (2) by area (services, personnel, resources, expenditures, or facilities); (3) by scope (nation, region, state, cooperative school district, school system, school, or specified grade coverage within a school); (4) by source or authorship (national, regional, or state professional associations, regional education associations, state offices, school systems, or consultant and advisory groups); (5) by authority (endorsements of national, regional, or state associations, requirements of accrediting agencies, state actions—laws, regulations, codes, adoptions, endorsements, or recommendations, or local (usually large city) stipulations); (6) by level (phases, quality levels, or range of achievement goals); (7) by terminology used, which may or may not reflect variations in philosophy (standards, guidelines, or criteria) or in scope (media center, school library, or other term); (8) by treatment (issued separately or incorporated with standards covering all parts of the school); and (9) by some combination of the categories that have been listed. It is no wonder that it takes a monograph or longer document to cover and to describe the standards for media programs in schools.

Standards have many purposes. They provide impetus in the establishment, development, and improvement of school media programs. They assist schools in designing media centers and programs of quality and in developing planning programs to achieve their goals over a period of time. They furnish criteria that can be used in connection with procedures for evaluation, certification, and accreditation.

One purpose is common to all standards: the reflection of goals whereby all schools provide students and teachers with a media center of good quality that makes easily accessible the resources of teaching and learning and the media services that are essential to any sound program of education.

Background Developments

Historically, the development of standards has followed three broad channels: national standards (developed by national professional associations), regional standards (the work primarily of regional education or accrediting associations but sometimes involving regional and state library associations and state educational agencies), and state standards (usually the responsibility of state educational agencies but frequently involving state professional associations or special committees). These categories cover three often separate and distinct evolutionary lines: standards for school libraries, standards for audiovisual services, and standards for unified programs in media centers.

Four areas that are closely related to the development, interpretation, and use of standards include evaluation, professional education, certificiation requirements and procedures, and federal laws and regulations that have affected state standards. Although these areas fall outside the scope of this article, it can be noted that the national standards for 1945,[2] 1960,[3] and 1969[1] include statements about professional education, and those for 1960 and 1969 have statements about certification. Certification is covered in some state standards; indeed, certification requirements are generally considered to form one type of standard for personnel.

A comprehensive history of standards for school media programs, showing relationships to objectives and patterns of education and to standards and other criteria for schools and their component parts, merits detailed inquiry and research. Parts of this historical background can be found in the publications by Spain,[4] Nickel,[5] Beust,[6] and Darling,[7] who present significant information in their descriptions of developments (collectively for the period 1915-62), in their reporting of trends, and in their analyses of the content of standards. Among the many trends that can be noted from these studies, major ones include: the shifts in emphasis from quantitative to qualitative standards and then to a combination of the two with primary importance attached to the qualitative standards (with emphasis on programs and services for teachers and students); the rise of the influence of regional accrediting associations and of the standards issued by these associations; the growing concern with having standards for school libraries form an integral part of standards for the school as a whole; and the emergence of standards for elementary school libraries. Beswick's study traces the

development of "the media centre" concept in American school libraries from the Certain standards through 1969.[8]

The decade of the 1960s, a shining period in the history of school media standards, opened and closed with the publication of national standards. The *Standards for School Library Programs*, undertaken by the American Association of School Librarians and published in 1960, constituted a landmark in the history of standards. The standards were formulated by a committee consisting of representatives from twenty professional and civic associations—a procedure that reflected the belief of the association that standards could most realistically be constructed with the assistance of individuals knowledgeable about school administration, teaching, the curriculum, and other related areas, inasmuch as the school library is but one part of the school and serves all other parts. The quantitative standards were compiled on the basis of data gathered from a survey of the best school library situations in the country. Tentative drafts of both the qualitative and quantitative standards were pretested by obtaining reactions from a large number of librarians in the field as well as from the boards, and in some cases the membership, of the associations represented on the committee. Recommendations for areas heretofore not covered in national standards were incorporated for: new school situations, schools having fewer than 200 students, and regional planning. The responsibilities of school board members, administrators, teachers, curriculum coordinators and citizen groups were also described. Standards were incorporated for situations where the school librarian had complete or partial administrative responsibility for audiovisual services and resources, and recommendations were made for providing these resources in libraries where the librarian had no administrative authority over the audiovisual program.

The 1960 standards had the happy experience of notable implementation, with the result that innumerable students and teachers benefited from the provision and improvement of library resources and services in their schools. A broad spectrum of activities was undertaken under the leadership of Mary Gaver in her capacities as chairwoman of the Standards Implementation Committee of the American Association of School Librarians and as chairwoman of the advisory board of two projects (the School Library Development Project and the Knapp School Libraries Project) for which foundation funds were obtained.

The objectives of the School Library Development Project (1961-62) were "to promote wide knowledge and understanding of the national standards; demonstrate a team approach by librarians, other educators,

and citizens in implementing the standards; develop plans and techniques for use in school library development; and promote the adoption, in each state, of sound state standards for school libraries."[9] One major objective of the Knapp School Libraries Project (1962-67) centered on demonstrating "the educational value of school library programs, services, and resources which fully meet the national standards for school libraries."[10] To this end, eight carefully selected schools were granted funds for their libraries which became demonstration centers and were visited by hundreds of teachers, administrators, media specialists, and others. Teacher education and citizen education formed the focus of other objectives. The project was well documented in the professional and popular press throughout its existence; its goals, procedures, many activities, and achievements are summarized by Peggy Sullivan in her final report as director of the project.[10]

The decade of the 1960s witnessed authoritative action in two areas greatly in need of this type of support. The first elementary school library standards to be prepared by a regional accrediting association were adopted by the Committee on Elementary Education of the Southern Association in 1962, and the Council of Chief State School Officers published policy statements dealing with the responsibilities of state departments of education for school library service (1961)[11] and for new educational media (1964).[12]

One of the most powerful thrusts in the development and improvement of media centers came with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The act had a boundless impact on improving the quality of education for the youth of the country, and enabled schools to acquire much-needed resources of teaching and learning, increased the number of media centers, particularly in elementary schools, implemented innovative and demonstration media center programs, and strengthened media services at the state level.

Title II of the ESEA called for state plans that included the development or revision of standards relating to library resources and for criteria to be used in selecting and allocating library resources. The 1960 national standards were extensively used for these purposes, and replaced existing standards in many states. (That this important act has been severely diluted in the last few years is a sad commentary and reflection on the government of the nation, and in several respects it is a strange paradox—for example, the right to read is emphasized as a national program, but the right to have something to read receives less and less support.)

During the last half of the decade, the Department of Audiovisual Instruction of the National Education Association issued quantitative standards for audiovisual personnel, equipment, and materials in elementary, secondary, and higher education, developed by Faris and Sherman.[13] Statements of National Standards were published for media programs in schools for the deaf,[14] and for school media programs in Canada.[15]

Standards for School Media Programs, published in 1969 by ALA and the NEA, constituted another landmark in the history of standards. Initiated by the American Association of School Librarians, the work on these standards was done by a joint committee composed of representatives from the American Association of School Librarians and the Department of Audiovisual Instruction of the NEA. These standards are the first to be prepared jointly by the two professional associations most directly concerned with the resources of teaching and learning in schools. The joint committee was assisted by an advisory board that had representatives of twenty-eight professional and civic associations (an expansion of the number involved in the formulation of the 1960 standards). Noteworthy features of the standards include the use of the terminology noted at the beginning of this article, the coordination of standards for school library and audiovisual programs, the formulation of standards based on the media center concept, the recommendation for a unified media program in the schools, and new treatments of standards for supportive staff and expenditures. Quantitative and qualitative standards are presented for the media program in the individual school. Although the final chapter presents principles dealing with media services at system, regional, and state levels, the joint committee concentrated its work on the school and recommended that standards for media programs at higher organizational levels be developed as soon as possible.

The Current Scene: Some General Observations

The 1970s augur well for standards for school media programs. Drafts for the new national standards are nearing completion and are being prepared by four task forces for media programs in the school building, in the district/region, in the junior and community college, and in the college and university. The task forces for the first two areas are composed of representatives from the American Association of School Librarians and the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (formerly the Department of Audiovisual Instruction),

and for the last two areas of representatives from AECT, with, in the case of the junior and community colleges, the cooperation of the Association of College and Research Libraries.

As already noted, queries were sent to state school library supervisors seeking information about matters relating to standards and requesting a copy of current state standards. Forty-five replies to the questionnaire were received. Statements of state standards, guidelines, or other nomenclature (hereafter all covered in the term "standards") were received from thirty-nine states; three states endorsed the 1969 standards[1] for their state standards and did not have a separate publication; and three states indicated that standards were in final steps of completion and not available for distribution.

The acceptance of the media center concept is discernible on a wide scale and takes various forms in different states. State standards endorse, support, or make provisions for the media center and its program in thirty-nine states. Obviously, this does not mean that media centers are not to be found in the other states—several supervisors indicated that media centers were encouraged in these states. The merger of the school library association and the audiovisual association to form a unified media association was reported by seven states. In four other states such mergers are being considered, and in one state a proposed merger was narrowly defeated. In answer to the question: "Do audiovisual resources and services in schools come under your jurisdiction?" twenty-seven respondents replied in the affirmative; thirteen checked both "no" and "in part," three said "no," and two indicated "in part." In connection with the last category, examples given included advisory services in the field, working with individual schools, and administrative responsibilities for ESEA Title II funds. Other examples of implementation of the media center concept can be found in the discussion of effects that follows.

The involvement of professional associations, media specialists in the field, school administrators, and other individuals and groups is evident in many states. Standards have been prepared by state educational agencies with the assistance of professional associations or committees in twelve states; they have been compiled by the unified media association, by a unified media committee, and by the school library association in one state each. In seven states advisory committees have had representatives not only from the audiovisual and school library fields, but also from administrative, teaching and other areas. In six states the school library and audiovisual associations have jointly participated in

the preparation of standards. Respondents from many states where the standards were initiated and formulated by the state educational agency, without formal committee or association arrangements, indicated that they had had the assistance of media specialists, administrators, and others during the preparation and evaluation of their standards.

During the last few years, the overall picture of state activities has been an impressive one. The dates of the documents received from the states ranged from 1965-72, with more than one-half of them being issued during 1969-72.

In connection with ongoing activities related to standards, eight states reported no activities (two of these were awaiting the new national standards), and two other states noted that their state standards had just been completed. Various stages of revising state standards were indicated: seriously being considered (two states), work on revision underway (nine states), and revision nearing or in the last stages of completion (seven states). Other activities listed included working toward legislative changes (three states), developing guidelines to be used with standards (two states), constructing instruments for qualitative evaluation of media programs (three states), using national standards as part of a state evaluation or survey of media centers (two states), and implementing national standards (three states). Respondents from seven states listed the revision of certification requirements for media specialists as a major ongoing activity.

Darling[16] noted the increasing number of states having standards for elementary schools, the growing support of standards applying to all schools regardless of grade level, the development of certification regulations, and the emphasis on the school library as an instructional materials center. These trends continue. Some newer tendencies can be observed in the incorporation of phases, levels, or other stages of achievement in many standards, the interest expressed by several supervisors in having standards that could be used to measure the achievement of behavioral objectives, and the reports from three states that certification requirements would be stated in terms of the competencies expected of media specialists.

Impact of National Standards

The effects of the 1960 national standards have been described by Ahlers.[17] For this article, the question: What impact have national standards had on your state standards? drew a variety of answers. Only

replies referring to the 1969 standards are reported here. Three states bypassed the question, two others stated "very little," one characterized the effect as "dichotomous," and the respondent from one state implied that an effort was made to hide the standards from public view.

The national standards are endorsed by three states, and state standards are similar or close to 1969 national quantitative standards in three other states. Two states reported that standards being written had the national standards for the advanced phase or level; another state reported that standards now being written closely followed national standards. In five states, the national standards were used as guidelines or guides in formulating and revising their standards; in one state, they served as the model; and one state based its state standards on national standards.

Other effects noted by differing numbers of states were: the standards serve as goals (eight), lend support (two), provide a direct impetus in revising state standards (five), help pave the way for the first combined library and audiovisual standards (two), prompt the state department of education to combine audiovisual and school library offices at the state level (one), influence the formation of a joint association (one), enable a state to go from poor standards to better ones (one) and "raised our sights" (one). Two states noted the use of standards in connection with some form of evaluation as effects. Many states cited the wide distribution and use of the standards throughout their states in this category.

Problems/Challenges

The terminology used in standards forms a trend in itself—from school library to instructional materials center or learning resources center to media center. Although philosophy is involved (to represent changing concepts and programs in changing times) and, possibly, persuasion (to represent current and dynamic conditions more vividly and to offset the strangleholds of old and undesirable images in adopting more contemporary wording), the primary objective for the terminology used in standards is that of effective communication. Decisions regarding terminology are not easily made since tradition is usually involved. In both the 1960 and 1969 national standards different decisions were made and reasons were presented. In neither case was the terminology prescribed or mandated.

From an analysis of studies of some special purpose grant schools, Mahar found that "children and school faculty reacted favorably to use

of terminology adopted from proposed new standards for school media centers."[18]

The use of the words "guidelines" or "criteria" in place of "standards" sometimes represents a purely semantical problem, but more frequently and increasingly it reflects a philosophical viewpoint. On the part of this writer, a personal bias supports "standards" not only because of its usage in national and some state standards, but also because of the strength it tends to convey to the nonprofessional public: guidelines are permissive, but a standard is a standard. However, advocates of guidelines maintain that guidelines are democratic, flexible, and lend more encouragement than do standards. Perhaps it is the difference between what could be and should be. As with many other semantic dilemmas, the problems are neither monumental nor insurmountable, if indeed they exist at all. The objective of all concerned is to provide measures whereby good media programs are insured, and if the trems used lead to the achievement of this goal in equal degree, then why quibble?

Standards can be and are guidelines. Guidelines, on the other hand, are not always identified with standards. Qualitative standards and guidelines are usually synonymous; in the areas of programs and services, the shadings become almost indistinguishable.

Problems of scope arise in connection with the variety of school situations to be covered in standards. Organizational and administrative patterns of schools, grade coverages and combinations within schools, degree of access to other media resources, instructional methods, geographic locations, demographic factors, and characteristics of student populations represent a few of the many variables.

These varying elements may assume such complexity and diversity that quantitative standards cannot be made to cover all situations, and even qualitative standards may have to be modified. Consequently, certain areas have always posed considerable difficulty in the formulation of national and, in some instances, state standards. Among these areas are: media programs in very small schools, in very large schools, in schools in rural areas,[19] and in twelve-grade schools; cooperative media services; system media centers;[20] state media agencies; and media networks at regional-within-a-state, state, regional, and national levels. Similar problems come in connection with such recent developments as alternative education in its many forms, contractual educational services, decentralization of school systems, the "politicalization" of

schools, educational parks, community centers, open schools and open classrooms, and the extension of school media services outside the school building.

The characteristics and needs of youth further add to the complexity of scope of standards. Very specialized needs affect both quantitative and qualitative standards. Under any circumstances, the potential and actual interests and needs of children and young adults, intensified by the emphases on individualized instruction, independent inquiry, and self-directed learning, are almost boundless.

Problems posed by rapid changes in society, in education, in communications, in the ecosystem, in governmental structures, and in numerous other ways that affect media centers necessitate continuous review and revision of standards, critically so in the case of national standards which have leadership and vanguard qualities attached to them in greater degree than other standards. Continuing review and revision form primary requisites for keeping standards realistic, for constructing planning programs and for incorporating modifications and changes that come about after innovations have been tested. Revision is needed to provide promptly for both unforeseen and foreseeable changes, including those in exploratory or initial stages of development. Examples of the latter include networks for school media services and resources, the use of cable television, instructional system designs, and the cartridge revolution. The burden is simply too great and the procedures too hazardous to impose upon those formulating standards the obligation to prescribe for conditions that may not fully materialize or become easily and economically accessible for several years. Standards must be handled within the context of the known and what reasonably can be projected for a time span of one or two years.

Nonetheless, it is essential for those involved with standards to recognize emerging trends and changes, and to accept the principle that changes may materially, sometimes radically, alter past and present patterns and practices in media programs.

Objective bases, not theoretical opinions, should shape standards. State and regional standards claim validity primarily on the basis of experience and the judgments of experts familiar with the conditions in the geographical area involved. An early example of objectivity can be found in the testing of the validity of the elementary school library standards and the needed time span for their realization of the Southern Association, cooperatively sponsored by the Committee on Ele-

mentary Education of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the Standards Committee, Region III, of the American Association of School Librarians.[21]

National standards pose a different situation. As described in the Preface, the *Standards for School Library Programs*[3] (1960) presented standards that were based on objective evidence gathered from the best school libraries in the country, designated by the school library supervisors or other authorities in the state departments of education. In order to avoid the restrictions of reporting only the status quo, librarians in the best situations were asked not only to indicate what they had in the way of quantitative provisions, but also what they needed to achieve the objectives of their programs and to implement a fully functional media program. Similarly, information from the field was obtained from the best school library situations regarding programs and services. Thus, the 1960 national standards, both quantitative and qualitative, were based on objective evidence from existing conditions and from realistic appraisals of what was further needed.

The 1969 standards have, on occasion, been described by the uninformed as being purely theoretical and unrelated to ongoing programs. One of the first items on the agenda of the advisory board of these standards was the discussion of whether studies similar to those undertaken for the earlier version should be made, and the decision, supplemented by the counsel of statisticians, was that the 1960 version provided a strong enough base from which to work and that supplementary or recent evidence could be obtained from the viewpoints expressed by practitioners in the field and by the judgments of other authorities; these recommendations were subsequently followed.

Problems of interpretation relating to standards, especially national standards, arise from several causes, including faulty reading. The most common of these, and in many ways the most dangerous, is that of interpreting standards in terms of isolated parts rather than in their entirety. Most standards are very closely interrelated and interdependent, so that isolated parts can suffer from misinterpretation when removed from the total context. A quantitative standard has a direct and significant relationship to other quantitative standards; and all quantitative standards are tied to qualitative standards, which depend upon quantitative measures for their totally effective implementation.

There has always been an unfortunate tendency on the part of standards users to want quantitative standards summarized in tabular form

and to have these summaries available, not only for separate viewing in the volume but also for separate distribution, isolated from the program of services, or qualitative standards. This procedure can lead, and often has led, to serious misinterpretation. Similarly, a mere list of figures, without textual rationale or commentary, can be meaningless or horrifying to those unacquainted with the contextual ramifications or to those who may be familiar with them but are seemingly unwilling or unable to relate quantitative to qualitative measures. Quantitative standards for staff have been victimized the most in these respects; this may largely explain why national standards for staff have been the quantitative standards least implemented—a critical matter inasmuch as this is the key standard on which media programs of good quality are dependent.

Another matter affecting interpretation which has already been mentioned is that of rigidly defining standards that are not mandated as (1) being prescriptive in every respect, without modification or adaptation, and (2) as forming entities to be achieved immediately. Some standards spell out phases or quality levels or other stages of development; all standards allow for planning programs involving degrees of achievement within a reasonable time span.

Implementation represents one of the most important aspects of standards. In the case of national standards, effective implementation can represent the difference between their success or failure, their relatively quick translation into action or a dishearteningly long time lag. This holds true even in those many situations where national standards may form long-range goals—in this event, action and success take the form of developing planning programs for a period of time, updating state standards to come closer in line with national recommendations, and other measures.

Effective implementation carries with it the desirable attribute of involvement—not only of the professional individuals and associations most directly concerned, but also of parents, other citizens, and civic groups. As already noted, these activities can and have been carried on at national, regional, state, and local levels.

Regional standards, in cases where they are issued by accrediting agencies, carry built-in implementation. Mandated state standards also have this characteristic, as do related state regulations involving qualifications for federal and state financial assistance for media centers.

Implementation takes on another cast in some states—the implemen-

tation of activities and plans that lead to a revision of outdated standards, or to the upgrading of minimal requirements that are too low, or to the formulation or adoption of standards where none now exist.

National standards often suffer at the hands of individuals who label them as visionary or impossible of attainment and from those who have a personal bias against them. These attitudes frequently reflect fears—in the case of the former, fears of being unable to cope with the problem of improving conditions in the situation in which the individual is working, and in the latter case, fears that the standards constitute a threat to them and what they are doing.

Too often overlooked or ignored is the overall primary objective of standards—to provide teachers and students with the media services and resources to which they are entitled. Surely no one could deliberately reject such an objective. Surely excellence in media programs is not something to be feared.

Standards, in an important sense, represent a statement of faith, on the part of the individuals and groups involved, in the value of media resources and services as a vital and fundamental part of the education (both formal and informal, structured and unstructured) of youth. The translation of this faith (and within its fabric falls the assumption of responsibility) means, simply, not only working for the provision of good media center programs but also describing and implementing the elements—the standards—that will bring them about.

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